

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES - DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

5.4 PARAMETERS FOR THE USE OF SUPPORTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

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I. DEFINITION

Supportive psychotherapy is at the core of all other effective psychotherapies, and consists of interpersonal interactions designed to decrease anxiety, create hope, foster autonomy, and encourage adaptive behavior.

II. PARAMETERS FOR USE OF SUPPORTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY

Supportive psychotherapy should be informed by knowledge of the individual's diagnosis, symptoms, functional level, environmental support, and linguistic and cultural background.

A. Essential Use

Supportive psychotherapy should be a component of all treatment interventions, including those involving other forms of psychotherapy and psychopharmacologic interventions (e.g., "medication management").

B. Assessment

Assessment for effective supportive psychotherapy should include, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Presence of co-occurring substance abuse, developmental disabilities, and other general medical conditions;
2. Presence of psychosocial stressors;
3. Presence of cognitive impairment or thought disorder;
4. The nature of the client's goals; and
5. The presence and nature of the therapeutic alliance.

C. Individualized Approach

1. The precise content and nature of supportive psychotherapy should be individualized for each client.

2. Clinical judgment should be exercised in determining the capabilities and personal interests of a given client for the purpose of obtaining a mutually agreed upon treatment course.
3. Effective feedback, support and education should be used to give the client knowledge of the level of impairment, the type of life adjustments that may be necessary, and the expected results of psychotherapy.
4. The client's support systems (family/culture) should be integrated into supportive psychotherapeutic interventions.
5. The emotional meaning to the client of the therapeutic relationships should be recognized and should inform treatment.
6. Termination of therapy with a given therapist must be appropriately managed and must take into account the emotional meaning that the relationship has for the client.

D. Informed consent

Individuals providing psychotherapy should obtain informed consent and adhere to all applicable ethical principles (e.g., California Board of Behavioral Science's Code of Conduct)

E. Monitoring

The response of the patient to supportive psychotherapy and the nature of the therapeutic alliance should be continuously assessed during treatment.

F. Supervision

All clinicians providing supportive psychotherapy must have access to ongoing clinical supervision/consultation.

G. Privacy

Appropriate degrees of privacy must be ensured for supportive psychotherapy.

H. Documentation

Supportive psychotherapy should be documented in the clinical record, describing the content of the supportive interaction and the patient's response.

I. Contraindications

Supportive psychotherapy alone is not appropriate in clinical presentations in which other forms of psychotherapy have demonstrated efficacy.